A Research Proposal
For
Admission to Ph. D. in English

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MODERN ENGLISH SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES FROM THE INDIAN TRADITION

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Introduction

Autobiography has been recognized as a major literary form. It has been defined in several ways. Helga Schwalm defines autobiography: "Autobiography in the broader sense of the word is used almost synonymously with "life writing" and denotes all modes and genres of telling one's own life".

According to M. H. Abrams Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *A glossary of Literary Terms* "Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself. It is to be distinguished from the memoir, in which the emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed, and also from the private diary or journal which is day- to- day record of the events in one's life, written for personal use and satisfaction, with little or no thought of publication."

According to the above two definitions, autobiography makes once own personal life public. It's universal appeal of truth catches the attention of every reader. This literary form helps for the self exposure to the natural instinct of human nature. The feeling of being justifiably witnessed by ourselves is mostly welcomed in the autobiographies. Autobiography is the most appropriate form of literature for self realization. Spiritual autobiography is the honest expression of the unsaid which directly connects with the divine values like love, compassion and justice. It is an experiential process rather than worldly proven experiments. It is the purest form of the emotions and experiences connected to self. It finds out once own process to attain the state of transcendence. Here, the life journey is witnessed by the author himself. Spirituality is a departure from ordinary to eternal state. It is a quest to realize the meaning of our own existence. It encompasses the scope of faith and practices. Now a days,

spiritual autobiographies are being referred by some corporations to incorporate spirituality in their strategies as their social responsibility.

The present study aims to unfold the attainment of existential stories of life. It is expected to explore the role of spirituality to understand the need for human existence. This is an attempt to know the closeness of the author to spirituality. It is to develop vision to nurture the values like love, compassion and justice.

Autobiography in Historical Perspective

In the historical perspective, Augustine's *Confessions* is an ancient landmark in the history of autobiography as a literary genre. According to Jean Paul, unfinished and unpublished autobiographies are the description of one's life by oneself.

In English, D'Israeli speaks of "self-biography". Taylor, a critic of D'Israeli, suggested "auto-biography". Autobiography is not a historiography as well as biography rather it enquires into someone's identity and its developmental path. The autobiographer looks back to tell the story of once own making from the beginning to the present. It tends to focus on the autobiographical subjects as singular individual.

The spiritual autobiographer tells the story of self-renunciation. By 1800, the task of autobiography was to represent a unique individual. Goethe explicitly writes of himself as a singular individual embedded in and interacting with the specific constellations of his time. Autobiography thus focuses on the life of a singular individual. In this senseby the early 20th century there was an increasing skepticism about the possibility of a cohesive self emerging through autobiographical memory. Modernist writers experimented with fragmentation

Critical Paradigms in Historical Perspective

According to George Misch's survey of the history of autobiography, it is a reflection of the approaches of forms of subjective consciousness. He thus acknowledged the historical specificity of forms of autobiographical self-reflection. Misch says that an autobiography is

an original interpretation of experience. Misch considered autobiography the supreme form of the "understanding of life. Autobiography thus constructs an individual life course as a coherent, meaningful whole. Anglo-American theories of autobiography focuses on "inner truth". Rousseau's and Goethe's autobiography are the recognizable generic model. The autobiography that resembles modern autobiographies in structure and content is the modern kind of autobiography. Autobiography's scope now includes the diary, journal as "serial autobiography". De Man's deconstruction of autobiography rethinks autobiography as an institutionalized communicative act.

In this regard, it poses the question about those who have no voice of their own, who cannot speak for themselves. It can be concluded saying that scholars have engaged with the role of aesthetic practices into a work of art

Survey of Literature (Research on Autobiographies)

The book *A History of Psychology in Autobiography,* has introduced the history of psychology in autobiography which takes readers through the personal and intellectual journeys. This deals with the internal struggles, and public conflict. This has opened various fields of research.

Apparitions of the Self is written by Janet Gyatsoin in which he focuses on the recognition of the Self. In this volume, Janet Gyatso studies the secret autobiographies by the Tibetan Buddhist.

The book, *Autobiography and the Psychological Study of Religious Lives.* is the international series in the psychology of religion. It studies the human lives as an object of research. It comments on a method that to be used to obtain unique data about subjective human experiences.

The book *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century* by Linda Anderson's publication covers an extensive range of introduction to the study of autobiography. Now it

seems that the study of autobiography developed in autobiographical criticism paying attention to psychoanalytic, poststructuralist and feminist approaches.

In the book *Derrida and Autobiography* by Robert Smith, offers both a reading of the philosophy of Derrida and an investigation of current theories of autobiography. Smith thinks through Derrida's texts in a new Derridean way. He finds new viewpoint to analyze the work of classical writers including Hegel, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Freud and Man.

Design and Truth in Autobiography by Roy Pascal focuses on art of autobiography, its origins, it's form, popularity. This study suggests some of the answers to these questions.

Thus, the comprehensive study of literature review and critical works of writers, critics, scholars make it clear that the literary criticism on the autobiographies hold a great significance but no critical work seems carried out till date on spiritual paradigms which is intended to explore in present research.

Objectives

In order to critically analyze the autobiographies, the research shall attempt to :

- to analyze the purpose of the text, whether it is written to inform, persuade, or entertain
- to evaluate its effectiveness by examining its use of anecdotes, facts and examples
- to evaluate the author's writing style, diction and tone
- to study the autobiography in English literature having the elements of spirituality
- to study the experiential process to be connected with the divinity
- to understand the need and role of faith in human life
- to examine the quest for transcendence
- to make the comparison of religion and spirituality
- to study the impact of spirituality on human life.
- to enquire into the major thematic concerns of the text

Hypothesis

The present study is based on the following hypothesis:

- Spirituality exists since the origin of human being.
- Spirituality is the inescapable central fact of human existence.
- Spirituality helps to bring the change among the fundamentalist.
- Spirituality is a tool to nurture the values like love, compassion and justice to avoid the depressive havoc of modern life.
- The selected autobiographers are the representatives of their cultural religious and social ethos.
- All the selected writers tell the untold tale of their quest for self realization.
- All the selected autobiographies reveal the attainment of the stage of bliss.

Tentative Scheme of Chapterization

This research tentatively proposes to follow the chapter scheme given below:

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Review of Autobiography as a Literary Genre.

Chapter III: Elements of Spirituality in the Selected Autobiographies.

Chapter IV: Representation of the Self

Chapter V: Quest for Self Realization

Chapter VI: Conclusion and Suggestions.

Bibliography

Significance

Although the study of autobiography has attracted critical attention in literatures from all ethnic groups over the world, Indian English Autobiographies, particularly those belonging to the category of 'Spiritual Autobiography', have not been assessed critically till date.

The critical analysis of this prominent branch from the 'Prose Non Fiction' genre will be a worthwhile research endeavor. It will also hopefully, make a substantial addition to the existing critical tradition. Full length studies of the selected primary texts have not been carried so far. Therefore it becomes essential to undertake the task of the proposed critical analysis.

Methodology

The present study would be carried out systematically and the Library Research method will be used for attempting critical analysis. The proposed research does not involve any fieldwork. Internet sources, material such as critical reviews, articles, papers, etc will be used exhaustively. The writers of the primary texts and other experts in the field may be contacted/interviewed for eliciting responses on issues deemed to be critical for the research. The MLA style manual (8th Edition) will be followed.

Scope and Limitations

At larger level, the present study will deal with the autobiographies as a genre of literature but the study would have certain limitations. The study will undertake only the predetermined autobiographies.

Paramahansa, Yogananda. *Autobiography of a Yogi.*

Rampuri. *Autobiography of a Sadhu.*

Sri, M. *Apprenticed to a Himalayan Master.*

Swami, Sivanand. *Autobiography of Swami.*

Swami, Om. *If Truth Be Told: A Monk's Memoir.*

The study will be limited to the critical analysis of modern english spiritual autobiographies from the Indian tradition and it will be strictly imitated to above mentioned texts.

Probable Date of Completion of Work

The present research work would probably be completed within four years from the date of registration.

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